BRITISH COLUMBIA

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tel (250) 387-0327
fax (250) 387-0329

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highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

Labour Market

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate rose 0.4 percentage points, to 8.8% (seasonally adjusted), between March and April.** The number of people with jobs fell 0.6%, but the effect of the downturn in employment was mitigated by a 0.2% decline in the size of the labour force. Canada's jobless rate also rose, from 7.8% to 8.3%. However, the increase at the national level was the result of people joining the labour force at a faster rate (+0.6%) than the increase in the number of jobs (+0.1%).

  Unemployment rates were up in six provinces. Newfoundland (+0.9 points, to 18.5%) and Ontario (+0.8 points, to 7.2%) saw the largest increase in unemployment. Nova Scotia (-1.1 points, to 9.2%) was the only province where there was a significant decline in the jobless rate.

  Victoria's unemployment rate fell to 6.3% (3-month moving average), its lowest level this decade. In Vancouver, the unemployment rate was 8.2% in April. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Among the regions, Northeast (7.9%, 3-month moving average), Mainland/Southwest (8.2%) and Vancouver Island/Coast (8.7%) had the lowest unemployment rates.** North Coast/Nechako (9.2%) was the only other region where the unemployment rate was below ten percent.

  Cariboo (15.4%) continues to be plagued by high unemployment. The region's unemployment rate has been climbing during the last three years, and has remained at or above fourteen percent since early 1998. Unemployment has also increased in Thompson/Okanagan, where the jobless rate was 10.7% last month. In contrast, Kootenay's unemployment rate (10.8%) was the lowest it has been since late 1997.

  Source: Statistics Canada

Self-Employment

- **Twenty-one percent (395,200) of the 1.9 million people working in BC last month were self-employed.** Another 4,100 were working in a family business without pay. Including unpaid family workers, the number of self-employed people in BC was 3.4% higher last month than in April 1998. Nationally, self-employment was up 4.6%. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **One in three (128,900) self-employed British Columbians had paid help in April.** Until recently, the number of self-employed workers in BC with paid help had been shrinking. However, there has been a reversal in this trend since the beginning of the year. Last month, for the first time since late 1996, an increase in the number of workers with paid help (+9.3%) was the main source of growth in self-employment. The number of self-employed workers who did not have any paid help rose only moderately (+1.6%) after posting double-digit growth throughout most of the last three years. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Labour Disputes

- **Labour strife has lessened in BC during the last ten years, with employee absences due to labour disputes becoming less common.** In a typical week during the 1990s, an average of 8 out of every 10,000 employees in BC stayed off the job due to a labour dispute. This compares to an absentee rate of 42 per 10,000 workers during most of the 1980s.

  British Columbia gained a reputation as a province with significant labour unrest in the 1980s, when there were more workers affected by labour disputes here than in any other province

Report **Immigrants to BC from Mainland China**

Did you know...

One in two immigrants landed in BC between 1986 and 1996 did not speak English when they arrived in Canada. In 1996, 9% of BC's foreign-born population did not have any English language ability.

except Quebec (where the absentee rate was 43 per 10,000). Alberta (2) and PEI (<1) had the smallest number of workers affected by job action. BC workers were one-and-a-half times as likely to be off work due to a labour dispute as workers in the rest of the country (26) during the period from 1979 to 1988.

In the last ten years, however, the situation has reversed, with workers in the rest of the country more likely (13 per 10,000) to be off work as a result of a strike or lockout than those in BC (8). Quebec (13), Newfoundland (13), and Ontario (10) are the provinces with the most labour unrest. In Alberta, Nova Scotia and PEI, less than 1 worker in 10,000 was off work due to disputes in an average week between 1989 and 1998.

Source: BC STATS & Statistics Canada

Income of Immigrants

- **In 1995, the median income of immigrant families in the province was almost $9,000 ($42,934, compared to $51,840) lower than the median for Canadian-born families.** There has been a gradual change in the economic situation of immigrant families in the province during the last ten years. In 1985, the median income of foreign-born families was only slightly lower ($32,436) than that of Canadian-born families ($34,244). Between 1985 and 1995, the percentage of immigrant families living below the low income cutoff (LICO) increased from 15% to 21%. The percentage of Canadian-born families with incomes below the LICO declined slightly (from 14% to 12%) during the same period.

Source: Immigration Profile, Ministry of Multiculturalism & Immigration

The Economy

- **BC manufacturers surveyed in April were much more optimistic about their business prospects than they have been for some time.** Among those surveyed, 20% expected their production to increase while just 10% anticipated declines. As a result, the balance of opinion (the difference between those expecting increases and those anticipating declines) was positive for the first time in a year. Only 13% of manufacturers expected new orders to decline–the first time in nearly two years that the percentage has been so low (it had been as high as 45% in January of 1998). Fifteen percent anticipated increases in new orders during the next three months. Despite a growing mood of optimism, one in four (25%) manufacturers say their inventories will be too high, compared to just 5% who think they will be too low.

  Sixty-eight percent of manufacturers said that they did not expect to have any production problems. Among those who anticipated problems, the most commonly cited difficulties were a shortage of working capital (12%) or raw materials (11%). Only 3% expected to have problems due to a shortage of skilled labour.

  Source: Statistics Canada

- **Department store sales in BC (including Yukon and NWT) fell 4.9% in March, compared to the same month last year.** BC was the only region where sales dropped below 1998 levels. Nationally, sales were up 3.3%. Other parts of the country saw increases ranging from 2.5% in New Brunswick to 12.2% in Nova Scotia.

  Quarterly sales figures for BC were down 1.5%, as the province has lagged the rest of Canada since the beginning of the year. Nationwide, department store sales increased 4.9%.

  Source: Statistics Canada

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities rose more than a third (+35.7%), increasing to $372.9 million (seasonally adjusted), between February and March.** Planned construction of both residential (+13.9%) and non-residential (+74.6%) projects was up significantly from February. Canadian permits rose 18.7%, with strong gains in both the residential (+11.4%) and non-residential (+28.1%) components. Permits were up in all parts of the country except Atlantic Canada.

  On a quarterly basis, the value of building permits issued in BC fell 11.1% in the first quarter. Nationally, the value of permits was up 3.2%.

  Source: Statistics Canada

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For data originating from Statistics Canada: data sourced to 'Statistics Canada' has been retrieved from CANSIM, the agency's electronic database; otherwise the source is identified as 'SC' plus the publication name or catalogue number.

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Infoline Report:

Immigrants to BC from China-Mainland

Contact: Frank Ip / (250) 387-0336

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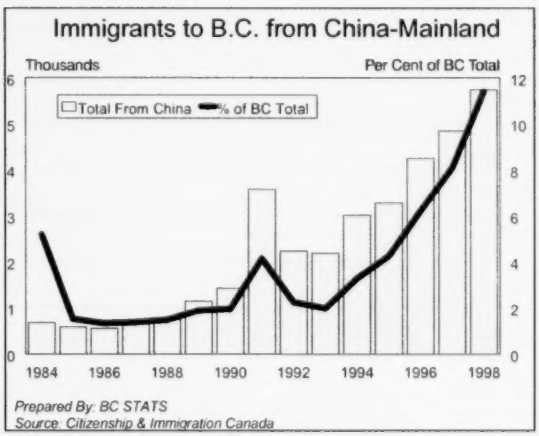
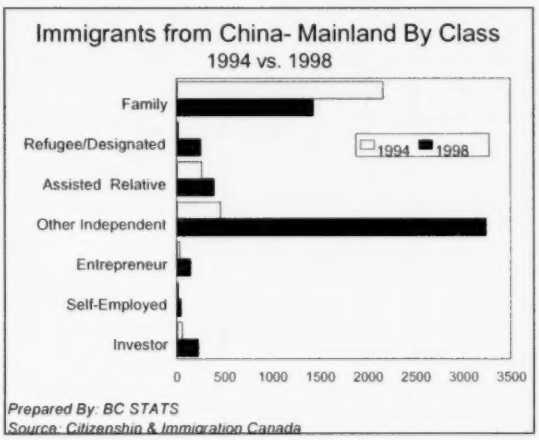
In 1998, China-Mainland (China) had become the leading source of B.C. immigrants. The total number of immigrants arriving from China in 1998 was 5,744 persons for B.C. and 19,617 for Canada. They represented 16 per cent and 11 per cent of total landings in B.C. and Canada, respectively. After Ontario, B.C. was the most popular destination for Chinese immigrants in 1998.

The characteristics of Chinese immigrants have also been changing as a result of the gradual opening up of the Chinese economy. Traditionally, immigrants from China were mostly in the Family Class and Assisted Relative Class. Although the total number of business immigrants coming from China is still relatively low, Chinese immigrants arriving under the Entrepreneur Class and Investor Class have grown during the last several years. In 1998, China-Mainland was the third largest source of investor immigrants and the fourth largest source of Entrepreneur immigrants to B.C.



At the same time, the number of refugees and designated immigrants from China has increased partially as a result of the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. The number of Chinese immigrants landed in B.C. under these categories has increased from a few persons each year before 1990 to a few hundred persons since 1991. During 1991, there was a sharp increase in the number of landing of Chinese immigrants under the Other Independent Class. This was primarily a result of the granting of landed immigrant status to a large number of Chinese foreign students studying in Canada after the Tiananmen Square incident.

About two-thirds of the Chinese immigrants who came to B.C. during the last five years did not possess adequate English language ability at the time of landing. A majority of them spoke Cantonese and Mandarin as their mother tongue. As a result of the high concentration of Chinese immigrants in the family and independent worker classes, education qualifications of recent Chinese immigrants were somewhat polarized. Of those Chinese immigrants aged 20 or older who came to B.C. during the last five yeas, 42 per cent had a secondary or lower education while 35 per cent had a bachelor degree or higher education.



It is believed that more immigrants from China will be coming to B.C. and Canada in the near future as China continues to open up its economy. It is also expected that the number of Chinese business immigrants will continue to grow. As the number of immigrants coming from Hong Kong and Taiwan declines, China will become an even more important source of immigrants to B.C. and Canada in the foreseeable future.

BC STATS, Min. of Finance & Corporate Relations, Box 9410 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC V8W 9V1
Tel: (250) 387-0327 Fax: (250) 387-0329 Web: http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca E-mail: BC.Stats@gems8.gov.bc.ca

Feature articles from previous *Immigration Highlights*

Dec 1998	Family and Income Characteristics of BC's Immigrant Population
Oct 1998	*Interprovincial Mobility of Immigrants*
Jul 1998	*Foreign Students Studying in British Columbia*
Apr 1998	*B.C. Immigrant Population, Ethnicity, and Language*
Jan 1998	*A Tale of Three Immigrant Cities*
Oct 1997	*Immigration from APEC Members*
Jul 1997	*Immigration from Hong Kong After the 1997 Handover*
Apr 1997	*Proposed New Immigrant Investor Program*
Jan 1997	*English Language of Recent Immigrants*
Jan 1997	*Team Canada's Mission to South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand*
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For more information, contact Kris Ovens at (250) 387-0359 or Kris.Ovens@gems7.gov.bc.ca

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Jan 1/99	% change on one year ago
BC	4,021.4	0.7
Canada	30,418.1	0.9
GDP and INCOME		
(BC - at market prices)	1997	% change on one year ago
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *($ millions)*	109,347	3.3
GDP *($ 1992 millions)*	98,201	2.2
GDP *($ 1992 per Capita)*	24,775	0.1
Personal Disposable Income *($ 1992 per Capita)*	16,340	-2.3
TRADE ($ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Feb	2,899	3.3
Merchandise Exports (raw) Feb	2,011	0.7
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Feb	2,735	-0.3
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		
(all items - 1992=100)	Mar '99	% change on one year ago
BC	110.3	0.5
Canada	109.5	1.0
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		
(seasonally adjusted)	Apr '99	% change on one year ago
Labour Force - BC	2,090	2.6
Employed - BC	1,906	3.1
Unemployed - BC	184	-2.3
		Apr '98
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	8.8	9.2
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	8.3	8.4
INTEREST RATES (percent)	May 5/99	May 6/98
Prime Business Rate	6.25	6.50
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.30	6.55
- 5 year	6.95	6.95
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	May 5/99	May 6/98
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.4560	1.4387
US $ *(reciprocal of the closing rate)*	0.6894	0.6950
AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS		
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Feb '99	% change on one year ago
BC	617.70	0.9
Canada	607.63	0.2

SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Earnings } Statistics Canada

Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

For latest Weekly Financial Statistics see www.bank-banque-canada.ca/english/wfsgen.htm

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Next week

- Labour Force Statistics, April 1999
- Tourism Room Revenue, Annual 1998
- Tourism Room Revenue, January 1999

BC STATS, Min. of Finance & Corporate Relations, Box 9410 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V1
Tel: (250) 387-0327 Fax: (250) 387-0329 Web: http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca E-mail: BC.Stats@gems8.gov.bc.ca